OXFORD DAYS

In 1936, we sailed on the American Banker to England, arriving in London and taking the train to Oxford. We lived there with a widow and her son at Kenilworth 7 Pevensey, Oxford. In conference with Principal Michlem, who was then the principal at Mansfield College, we decided the various courses I should take and the various lectures I should attend. It was a most interesting experience, for I took from Dr. Cadeaux who was a great New Testament scholar at that time; Father Dorsey who was the outstanding Neathomist and who was to become very influential in the destiny of Fordham University; I took from Hugh Walpole; and through the Oxford Union and other areas, we were able to see people like Winston Churchill, Kerensky, etc., and every week there was some outstanding person and you could attend the special lectures and secure a very interested interpretation of the day in which we lived. It was prior to the War and there was a great feeling of anxiety and a sort of sinister dread that war might be inevitable.

During some of the vacations, we visited the continent and we saw the German soldiers in action; we saw soldiers in Italy, and I remember one time riding on a streetcar when we saw little boys, six and seven years old, in black-shirt uniforms and I turned to Lucille and said, "Good heavens, those kids in America would be playing football. They shouldn't be in this military form here." A Jesuit tapped me on the shoulder and said, "If you think that, don't say it here." I found he was a Jesuit from Minnesota studying in Rome. It was a time of tension and a beginning of a time of great turmoil.
We spent one Spring term at the University of Zurich, which was a great experience. I had wanted to go there because of the influence of Barth and Brunner. I took a course in theology under Dr. Brunner and on several occasions I went to Basel to visit with Dr. Barth. I determined at that time that my Ph.D. thesis would be on Peter Taylor Forsyth, a forerunner of Carl Barth, and I had studied in my year at Drew and also at Oxford all the works of Peter Taylor Forsyth, who talked of the majesty of God and the greatness of God. In my interview with Barth, I asked him if he had been influenced by Peter Taylor Forsyth, for really he had practically taken the entire thinking of Peter Taylor Forsyth and made it much more dogmatic and artificial. I shall never forget that he was somewhat angry and said, "No--nein--nein." On subsequent research, however, I found that Barth did quote from Peter Taylor Forsyth, and I have very real reason to believe that there was much greater influence than he was willing to admit.

Prior to going to Oxford, my major professor, Dr. Edwin Lewis, had said, "Thompson, you should some day be in one of our Methodist schools or colleges." I said, "Dr. Lewis, that would be great. I would love it if it could be done." Dean Hough, who was dean of the School of Theology, said, "You know, Franklin, when you return, it might very well be that we could have a spot for you in one of the Methodist schools." I told him that would be wonderful and we would love it if it happened.

About six months before we were to return, I wrote to Dean Hough and reminded him of our conversation and wondered if anything had opened up for me through his office. He wrote back and said that he had not heard of anything and
no one had inquired about a possibility and so far as he knew nothing was available. I was somewhat disappointed, because I had hoped there might be an opening.

Naturally, since we thought we would be coming back to the New York East Conference because we had been at Cold Spring Harbor, we had taken the Conference Journal with us and tried to anticipate where we might land. It was kind of a "parlor game" that we played anticipating here and there. However, there was one place, Orient Point, which is one of the two farthest points on Long Island reaching out in the Atlantic, where the man had been there for 17 years; the salary scale was about at what our salary would be if we were full time in the Conference, and rather interestingly, Lucille had said, "Now, when we go to Orient Point, we will do this and we will do that." We had sort of built up a resistance to the possibility of going to Orient Point because it was one of the farthest points from New York and we enjoyed our association with New York very much because we went to various musicals, operas, plays, the museums and other cultural events which was a very enriching experience for us.

The Methodist Conference met in April and we did not receive any word on where we would be sent, although we were told that we would be allocated to a church at that time. We went to London and bought a New York Times, and I remember we stood at Oxford and Hobart Streets and I took one corner of the page and she took the other and we went down the appointment list in the New York East Conference and saw -- Orient Point--R. F. THOMPSON!
RETURN AND APPOINTMENT

We came back on the American Farmer which was a sister ship to the one we had gone over on. We were late coming back by about six or eight weeks because the term had not finished until that time.

When we got back, I went to see the district superintendent, who was Dr. Alderson, and asked him how it was that I was appointed to Orient Point. He said, "Well that is the place where the professors from Harvard and Yale go to write their books in the summertime and we wanted a young Oxford scholar to challenge them. You will enjoy it very, very much. It is a most enjoyable place.

Since we arrived in New York the day before commencement at Drew, Lucille suggested that before we went out to Orient Point we go to Drew for commencement and talk with our various acquaintances and professors. We got there about forty minutes before time for commencement and went to Dean Hough's office. He said, "Oh, Frank, it's good to see you. Have you read the correspondence I have about you?" I said, "No, what is it?" He said, "Don't go to commencement but read it and then ride in to New York with me from Madison."
I read the correspondence and it was with Dr. Bruce R. Baxter, who was President of Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. He said he was looking for a young scholar to be added to the faculty at Willamette to teach the History of Western Civilization. The job analysis said that one needed to be familiar with history, philosophy, theology, sociology and the humanities, in general, and be able to handle rather large classes.

While riding back to New York with Dean Hough, he said he thought that Dr. Baxter was one of the most unusual university presidents and that it would be a great opportunity to go to Willamette University, if the position were to open up, and it depended upon a personal interview with Dr. Baxter, to be given some time that summer.

I had already been appointed to Orient Point and we needed the economic floor because we came back with our resources completely depleted from Oxford and Zurich. I found on arrival at Orient Point that it was a very interesting place, rather conservative truck farmers, potato farmers particularly, and duck farms, and just really wonderful people. There was some bit of unusual feeling because the Reverend Mr. Frost who had been there for some 17 years, decided to retire from the ministry and stay on, although he was a comparatively young man. His wife had resources and they had purchased a house of their own and moved out of the parsonage and had decided to settle there. He was most cooperative and helpful and I had no problems whatsoever, so far as he was concerned.

As soon as we arrived, I started covering the parish by walking from call to call. I always made it a point to cover the entire parish in three months in calls and do it at least twice a year. The third week I was there a man drove up in front of the
house in a new Model A Ford. He knocked at the door and asked if I were Reverend Thompson and I said yes. He said, "These belong to you," and he gave me keys. I said, "No, they do not." We argued somewhat and he said, "Well, don't argue with me--go see Mr. Jaegger--John Jaegger." I went to see John Jaegger and he said, "I have been watching you and any man who can cover as much of a congregation as you have by walking needs transportation, so this is your car." I told him that I simply couldn't accept it and he said, "You will have to accept it because it is bought and paid for and it is yours." I was in a dilemma because in the meantime I had had a letter from Dr. Baxter asking me to meet him in Lincoln, Nebraska, at the Cornhusker Hotel, with the idea that we would go to Willamette University to be teacher of History of Western Civilization. After about a month or five weeks at Orient Point, I left New York by train and went to Lincoln, Nebraska, to meet President Baxter. I was waiting in the Cornhusker lobby when he came in and he came in with a lot of verve and dash, a big smile, his gray hair kind of rumpled up (as it always was) and he was, without doubt, the most wonderful person I ever met in my entire lifetime. The first thing he said was, "Come on, Frank, I have made a darn fool of myself; tell me how I did it." He had called Nebraska Wesleyan and asked for the chancellor and the chancellor had been asked to leave only about two weeks before and Dr. Baxter did not know that, and he was asking me what the situation was at Nebraska Wesleyan. In the meantime, I had known about the unhappy situation at Wesleyan because my in-laws lived within a block or two of the campus.

The interview with Dr. Baxter went very well; he wanted me to come; I was to teach the History of Western Civilization and have five classes of it. After the position had been definitely offered to me, I went back to Orient Point, talked to the district super-
tendent and bishop, and then talked to Mr. Jaegger. I told him that in light of the fact that I was to go into this new career I could not accept the gift of the car. He said, "Well, you need it very much to get from Orient to Salem," and I said, "That's right. Why don't you let me pay for it when I can and see that you are completely reimbursed?" He said, "That would be wonderful. We certainly have appreciated your ministry here and will be sorry to lose you." So we drove the car from Orient Point to Nebraska and spent some time with both sets of parents and then drove it to Salem, Oregon. I repaid Mr. Jaegger the entire cost of the car but he would not accept any interest payment from me.